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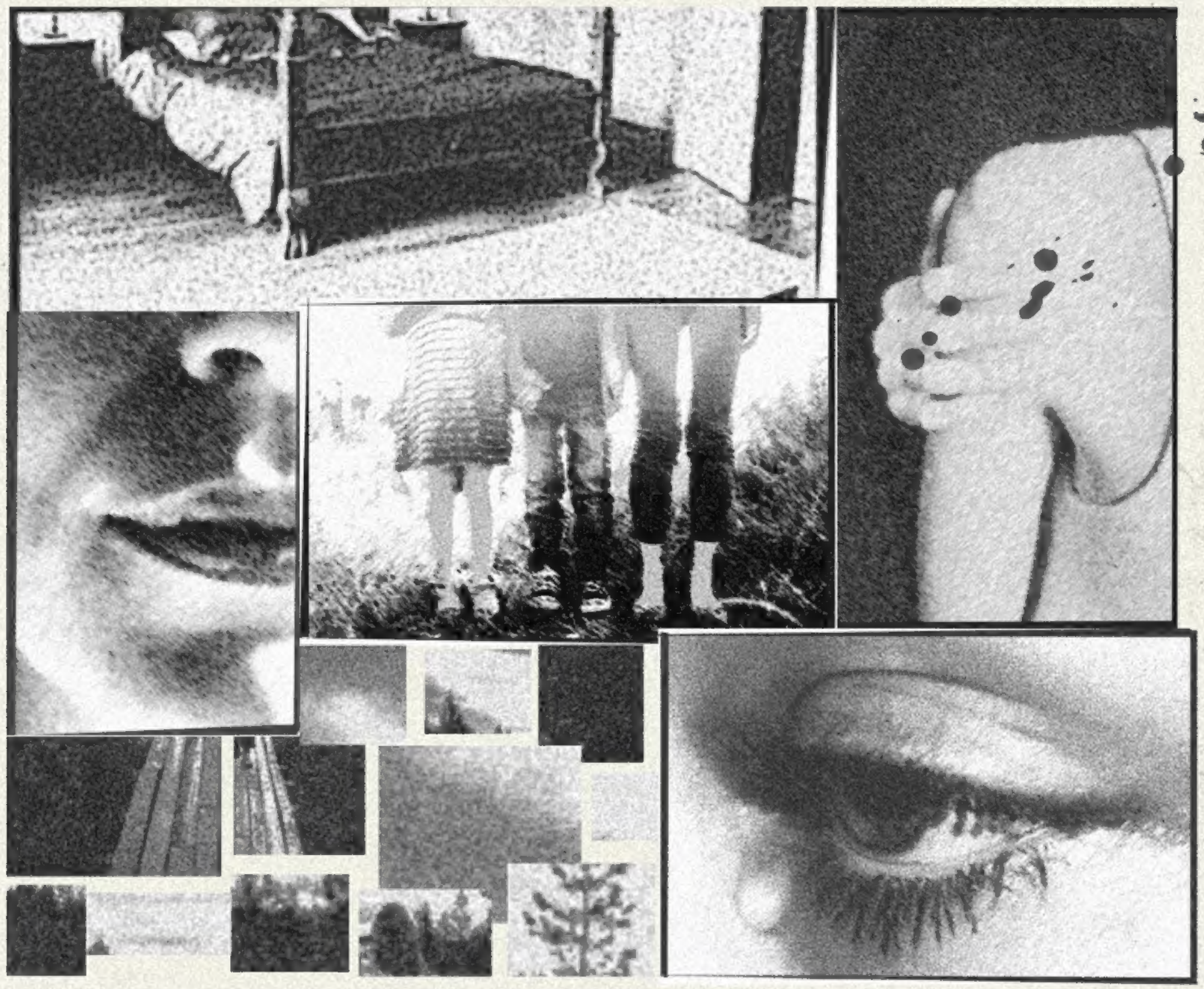

Unrest

UPLB Writers' Club
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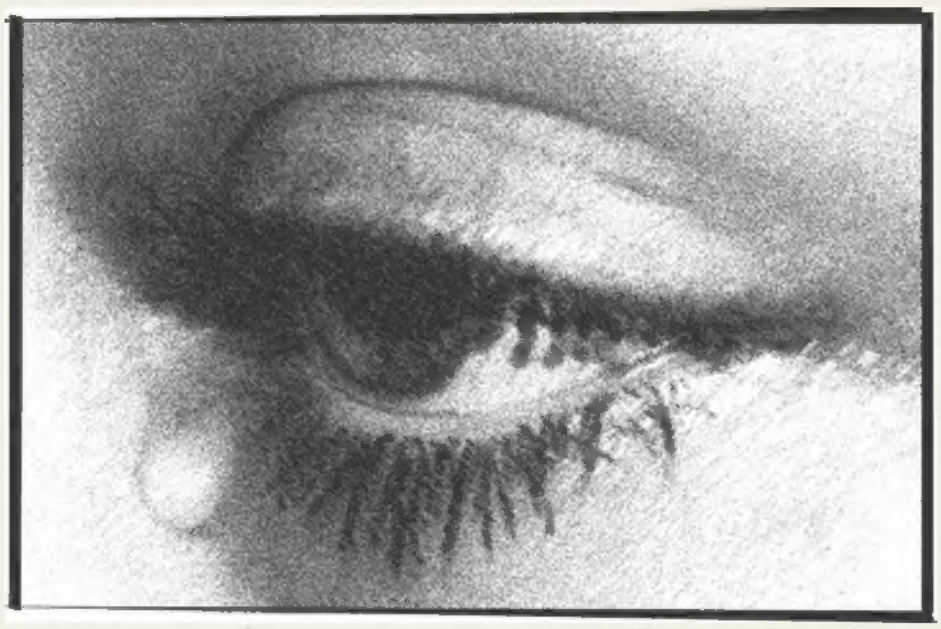
Triptych for a Dead Lover

You expect it— the ghost leaving your dead lover's mouth
Maybe in their bed, in the hospital, you expect it.
Their withering bones is like a ticking time bomb for their life
You measure the muscles in their arms when you hug them— you figure you still have time You expect it so you mourn them before they even die

But you never expected the bombs and you realized the bones of time breaks like you do— It is not real.
The news was cruel, the sparks, the screams
Your stomach in knots, the blood on the street they were just red paper things
The scrapes in your arms they sting a little bit, it does not compare
It does not compare to seeing your lover dead lying there

The sunbird continues to sing its song, gray in your lover's face
You went down on your knees in the cold,
and asked God what love will do to you- what it will make you do
And for the last time, you kissed your lover's mouth,
That ghost is in you, you wait for him, you wait for the next life.



Halimaw

Wala akong konsepto ng “monsters under the bed”.

Direktang nakalapat sa sahig ‘yung kama namin at walang espasyo sa ilalim. Kaya sa tuwing makikita ko sa TV kung paanong binabasahan ng *bedtime stories* ng nanay ang anak niyang hindi makatulog dahil sa takot, hindi ko iyon maintindihan.

Pero pwede mo palang hanap-hanapin ang bagay na hindi mo kayang unawain.

Kapag sinasabi ko kay mama na hindi ako makatulog at pinipilit kong basahan niya rin ako ng *bedtime stories* kagaya ng nasa TV, hindi niya iyon iniintindi. Minsan, tinatapik niya ako hanggang makatulog, pero madalas, ang sagot niya ay magbilang na lang ako ng tupa. Math ang pinaka-ayaw kong subject sa school. Tapos hanggang pagtulog ba naman, magbibilang pa rin? Ang mga gabing tulad nito ay malayo sa paghimbing.

Kaya hinanap ko yung sinasabi nilang “monsters”, nagbabakasakali na baka kapag nakita ko sila at itinuro kay mama, mapilitan na siyang basahan ako para makatulog. Bitbit ang flashlight, pinuntahan ko ang mga lugar na pwede nilang gawing tahanan bukod sa ilalim ng kama: sa likod ng ref, sa cabinet ng mga babasaging plato, sa loob ng arinola, pero wala. Sinubukan ko rin sumungaw sa bintana kasi baka nga naman kapag pinoy version ay nasa labas sila: sa puno parang kapre, sa ibabaw ng bubong parang tiktik, o kaya sa pagitan ng mga ulap parang manananggal, pero wala pa rin.

Bigla na lang silang nagpakita noong hindi ko na sila hinahanap. Isang araw, nasa tasa ng kape ko sa umaga. Tapos, nasa may pinto at pinipigilan akong lumabas. Maski sa tabi ng kama, bumabalot sa akin na parang kumot sa kabila ng init ng gabi. Napagtanto kong sa paghahanap ko ng halimaw noong bata pa ako, nalibot ko nga ang bawat sulok ng aming bahay, subalit nakalimutan kong tumingin sa aking sarili.

May mga araw na sila ay tila mga salikmatang alaala lamang, parte ng imahinasyon. Ngunit may mga sandali ring labis silang totoo, may kaanyuan, may tunay na pag-iral.

Sa kabila ng mga nagliligalig na halimaw sa aking isip, buong tapang kong sinusundo ang antok tuwing gabi. *Buti na lang, kaya ko nang magbasa mag-isa.*

Amidst

Musty air and the orange shade from the streetlights drenched the walls at 3 in the morning. It somehow reminds me of the bomb shelter my family and I were in the night we left my homeland, my country—even though I was now in our newly furnished bedroom, with you by my side.

Our clothes are momentarily spread on the floor—
unlike bodies of:
my cousin,
my four-year-old sister,
and my grandmother—
lay still in the dark as cars pass by in the intersection at the end of our street.

Your heavy breathing beside me echoed the sounds of the speaker warning and screaming and crying and the waning of life before this, before all of these—before you and me, despite the years that have passed of being displaced from the place I could only now picture through an elementary kid's Crayola drawing.

All of it is this chaos that I could never stop nor escape. And yet, amidst all of this unrest—when your index finger circles the dimple on my back—I lose consciousness. Of the untimely and unfortunate disruption that the bruises of war have tattooed on my skin, on my body.

You tether me, this godforsaken refugee.

c.h.

an escapist's peace

it's a fool's errand
to weave a forbidden romance in the shot of windswept hair, locks waving farewell
to the streetlights of a sleeping, twinkling neighborhood
heel of foot stomping over gas pedal,
thrilled at the prospect of leaving all known troubles behind
of everything you are sick of
the fantasy of a do-over swelling in the gust of anxious lungs
the runaway kid in a coming-of-age flick,
living life day-by-day
now you'll feel their romantic lows, too

it's easy to confuse escape for an attempt at peace
to liken yourself to balloons untethered
never looking down, only skyward, above all it once saw and knew

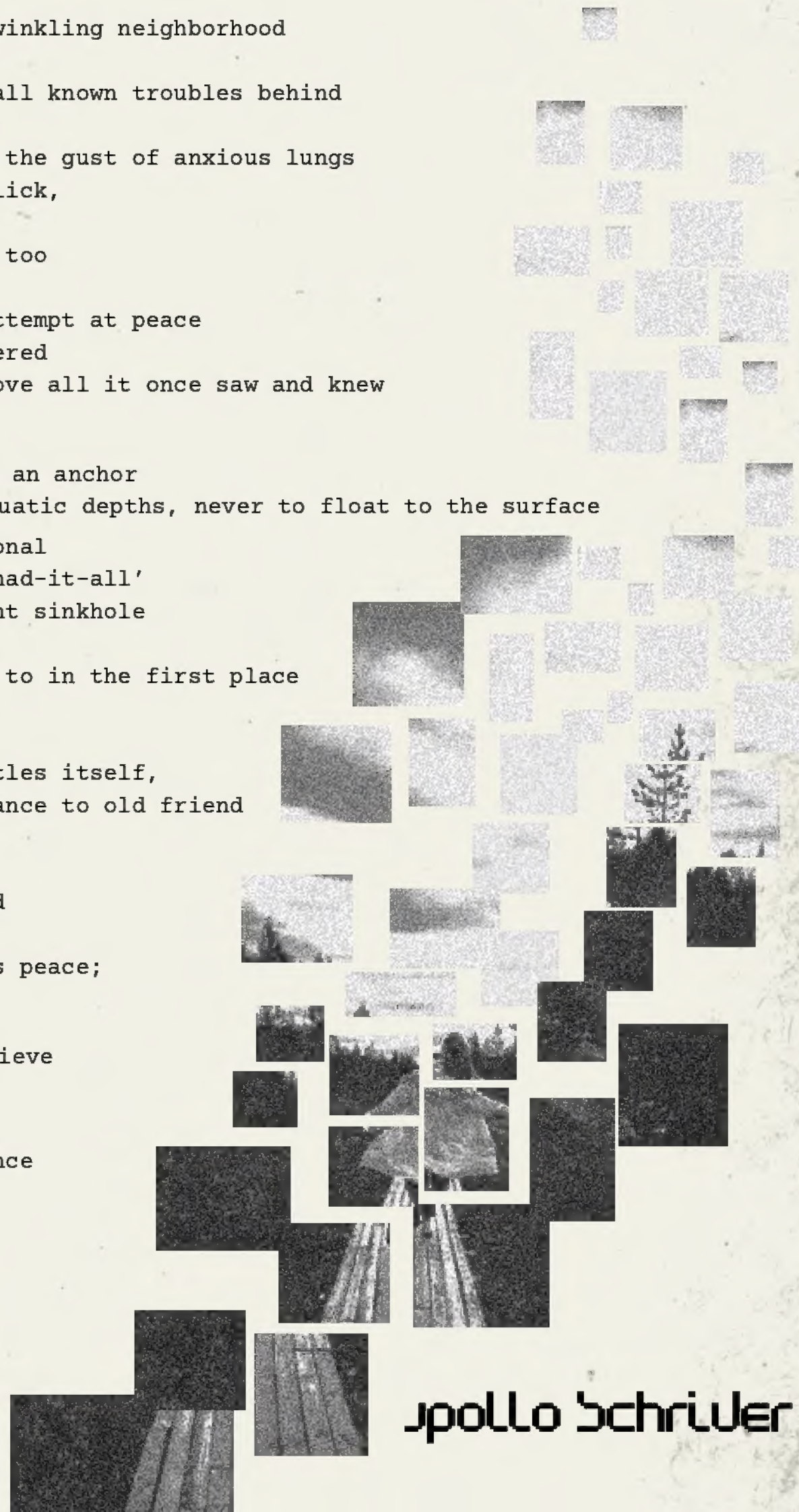
or to masquerade as an anchor
to drift into aquatic depths, never to float to the surface
indeed, as you kneel before confessional
you weep at the prospect of 'almost-had-it-all'
but all burdens well up into one giant sinkhole
upon admission of loss of control
of a life you've never had the reins to in the first place

eventually when adolescent panic settles itself,
when melancholia turns from acquaintance to old friend
the runaway kid's breathing slows
time turning Peter Pan resigned
as the truth of life settle over mind

there is no romance in the escapist's peace;

only temporary reprieve
to dwell as a runaway, lost child
is the way of the coward
wars will remain fought in your absence
only being rooted in adversity
will you ever remain empowered
to face the rough edge of the city

to know the brunt of life
is to remain rooted to the suffering
acknowledge that it is an inevitable
non-negotiable price for being



apollo schriver

the Answer

thoughts of big sister B

It has been three days since my last proper meal, my water bottle already half-empty.
I'm getting used to the occasional explosions at a distance, whilst forcing away thoughts of my home being reduced to rubble.
I run away from home, from all the familiar and comfortable things, all because of this madness.
How am I still alive? What was there to live for again?

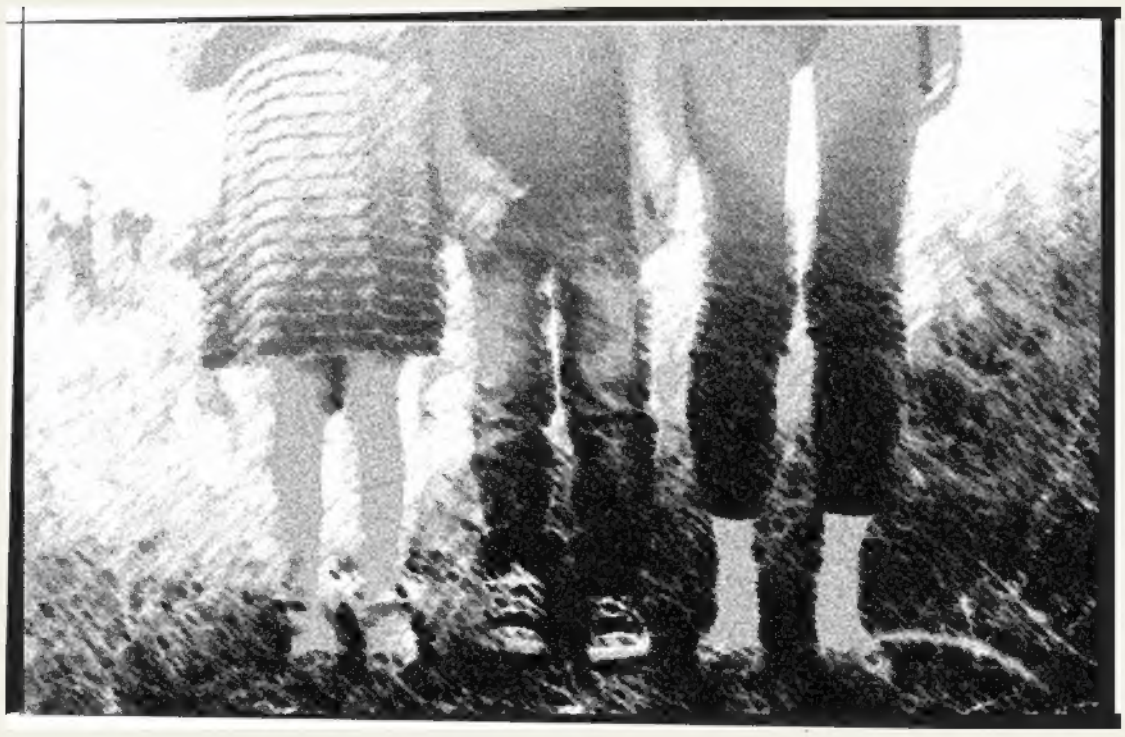
Albeit trembling a bit, I stand up and despondently announced, "Rest is over. Come on up! We have to keep walking."
My younger brother and sister complained and pleaded for mercy. How I wish to be under someone's protection like them.
But I have no such luxury. We haven't seen our parents since the war began.
I wonder… *where are they now? When will we be reunited? Are they still-* I dare not ask.

To my relief, we arrive at a town bustling and free from the destruction and chaos of war…
Or not. For how naïve can I be? When hunger strikes, and strike hard it does, the food distribution center becomes its own war.
Organizers futilely order us to form a line, whilst I lose my tattered sandals and my civility, and wrestle and jostle I return in kind to keep my bowl ready for the passing server.
How can I blame them? And how dare they blame me? We're all shoving against each other here, all for our younger and weaker and wounded relatives.

Come the dark cold night and my siblings would request and complain and cry themselves to sleep:
Request for the nonexistent blanket, which I regret and hate myself for not carrying during our hurried escape.
Complain for my growling stomach which distracts them from the drowsiness that caught up to them after a full meal.
Cry for our missed parents whose uncertain fate had become an unwelcome topic for us. How I envy them crying openly for them.

One innocent morning, after a successful battle for today's ration, the real loathed war comes crushing down what little hope I managed to nurture back again. All the shelling and fear, the crossfire and contempt, the barking soldiers and anger, everything I need to try to suppress to focus on reuniting with my family. And there, at a distance, right when I found him on the road, a stray bullet got to my little brother first.
Despite my urgent intentions, my knees and my mind betray my run through the gauntlet to save my brother gasping for air. How can I still fear death at this point?
But not my little sister, who runs past me from behind, well beyond my reach the moment I noticed her.
It is the split-second inaction that I knew I'll carry throughout my life, and as if to deny my pleas, the gunfire only intensified.
Please… please make the fighting stop. At least let me rescue them, and then you could fight yourselves to death for all I care.
Don't you dare close your eyes, you two. I'll really, definitely, go to your rescue, ok? I- I still haven't apologized for being the mean big sister that I am.

I don't know much else after that. Or rather, I don't care anymore.
I guess I got work as a kitchen helper. People who don't complain and don't demand much are easily hired, it seems.
Why did the war happen? For what purpose do men destroy lives and shoot guns at each other?
With all that is left of my shattered and fragile being, I despise war, and all the uncertainty and misery and loss it brings along.
And most of all, I despise myself. After all, what was there to live for?
How did I manage to get the answer after I've lost them?



Dearest,

Before you get angry, I have done my fair share of trials and errors in my 20 years of cumbersome being. I have opened my heart to the possibilities of life. I read. I write. I knit. I sing, at night. I paint, mediocrely. I dabbled on pottery and crafts that require dexterity. I studied things I never deemed interesting. People showered me with praise for my productivity and intellect. I was happy; I thought I was. Soon, gradually, painfully, I felt the growing gap between my mind, my body, and my soul. This is not me.

In the end, unfortunately, I could not triumph over years of silent woe.

I have always wanted to be a writer. My parents were not convinced that I can survive in the arts, though. They said it is not a career worth pursuing, to which I respond with pursed lips. I love writing so much; I did not expect that writing will be the last thing I am going to do, though. Still, I write.

Do not get mad. Do not pity. Do not regret my life for me. For the last 20 years, I have been stuck in a whirlwind of madness, self-pity, and regret. To get through it, I wrote. To get through it, I write. Pouring my heart on a thin sheet of cellulose fiber was the best thing I have ever done to preserve my fleeting peace—inching away, forever wavering, in an endless voyage into the verity of depression.

My doctor told me I could make it. My parents expected me to bounce back after taking my nightly pills. My friends disappeared the moment I stopped being fun. Classmates pitied my trips to the 'shrink' and teachers gave up on considering my lost cause. In the end, I was left alone to battle something bigger than myself, and I lost.

Know that after penning this little letter, I have come to my natural conclusion—that there is no more merit in pursuing unhappiness that is life. Know that I am off to pursue the lasting peace—a serenity due for the weary me. May your life be vastly different from mine.

Warmly,

therezein

The UPLB Writers' Club is a non-profit organization of young writers and literature enthusiasts based in University of the Philippines, Los Baños. Founded in the 1970s, the organization has since then marshalled its efforts to promote meaningful and socially relevant literature inside and outside the university.